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Croatia

Biotechnology

Testing of Biotech Products

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Report Highlights:

Croatia officially announces rigorous food testing on gmo (biotech) substances. This is the result of a big scandal with first gmo food testings and public fear of gmo. The Croatian Government will also speed up the procedure of forming the Food Agency and start adopting all necessary regulations for gmo labeling (Croatia has the Law but on the books but so far no rules or regulations on how to specify or test the labeling procedure see, HR 3019).

Croatian Health Minister commented on the situation by saying: "The position of the government is that Croatia must be a **GMO-free** country and gmo products will not be produced in Croatia. Those imported from abroad must be subject to stringent checks".

Includes PSD Changes: No
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Unscheduled Report
Vienna [AU1]
[HR]

Croatian officially announces rigorous food testing for gmo (biotech) substances. This is a result of the big scandal with first gmo food testings that demonstrated over 30 common foods in supermarket shelves contained gmOs. After two widely differing results from two Croatian biotechnology laboratories Croatia sent samples to a laboratory in Bern, Switzerland (see HR...) and their results showed that the laboratory in Zagreb was right and that only one product sample (a Croatian product, sausage with soy extract -soy beans were bought from Dutch or Germany company with offices in Zagreb, Croatia with statement that the product is gmo free) had over 1% of gmo presence. This proved that the Zagreb laboratory had correct results and that Osijek laboratory jumped the gun announcing the wrong results causing public hysteria and panic.

This led the Croatian Government to speed up the procedure of forming the Food Agency and start adopting all necessary regulations for gmo labeling (Croatia has the Law but no under law acts that would specify labeling procedure see HR 3019). Regulation for labeling and trash holding is already drafted. The regulation on conditions that biotech testing labs have to fulfill will be prepared within one 1 month and in 6 months will be prepared regulation on procedure on novelty food approval.

Croatian health Minister commented on the situation by saying: "The position of the government is that Croatia must be a GMO-free country and gmo products will not be produced in Croatia. Those imported from abroad must be subject to stringent checks".

Regardless on the fact that Croatia still doesn't have regulations that would deal with gmo labeling and registration of novelty foods, importers are saying that their customers are asking for proof that the products are gmo free (especially supermarkets) and border inspectors request lab certificates that foodstuff is gmo free. This is a problem for international companies because they source their inputs on word markets where it is custom to take a statement from supplier (producer) that the product is gmo free and lab. certificate is requested only if it is discovered that the supplier is not reliable.

In anticipation of results from Switzerland, the Croatian press was filled with articles dealing with gmo (some balanced and a lot of negative press) and food safety in general (dealing with heavy metals and antibiotic presence). Some articles had head scary headlines like "Poison in our food". All this is alerting public that now want to control and have a saying in food safety, which among other things meant that they don't want gmo in food.

Background:

On February 11 Croatian National Television announced that the first testing of food samples was done in one of Croatia's new food quality-biotechnology testing laboratories and that almost all samples contained more than one percent of substances derived from genetically modified organisms. The products were from Croatian and foreign companies. In addition to that, they found meat in vegetarian pate and pork and beef in chicken pate. The public was shocked but the Minister of Health said that the results were to be published soon (because testing in Zagreb laboratory wasn't so bad) and that the names of the companies will be published after testing in Bern, Switzerland.

At this moment companies that are owners of the products containing gmo can be punished for not labeling gmo presence and penalties are severe. In their favor goes the fact that there are no regulation that would regulate threshold, details of labeling, etc... There are only three laws that generally describe handling of these products (HR 3019). This "incident" will, probably, speed up the process of enacting regulations that deal with gmo in food and feed.

What actually happened?

One of two laboratories that can test on genetically modified organism presence in food the one in Osijek received 33 samples (domestically produced and imported) from Sanitary Inspection and tested them on quality and gmo presence. In 14 samples they found more than 1 percent of gmo presence. The products were soy and soy products, vegetarian pate, corn flakes, oil, and canned corn. This lab said that they send the samples on another analyses in Italy but that turn out to be debatable according to the later news articles. This woke up ghosts. Greens got the confirmation for all the accusations they made during the years of protests against biotech and pushing for biotech ban legislation to be passed. Consumers threatened to sue companies that don't label gmo, consumer groups said that the companies in question must be punished, producers threatened suing labs for publishing partial information, supermarkets want to withdraw the food containing gmo, sanitary inspection tightened up inspections even on the border (requesting gmo free certificates for fresh produce and commodities, taking samples), etc.... Than the laboratory in Zagreb did the cross check on 12 samples of the same products and the results were much better. Only one sample had more than 1 percent of gmo, 5 had traces of gmo, and 7 had no gmo. Was that a cover up, who knows? Samples were than send to the laboratory in Bern, Switzerland and their test results will tell us more.